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LETTER DATED 18 FEBRUARY 1994 FROM THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT CONTAINING THE UNITED STATES VIEWS ON THE CONTINUING OPERATION AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS REGISTER OF CONVENTIONAL ARMS

I have the honour to forward to you a document containing the United States Views on the Continuing Operation and Further Development of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms.

Could you please take the appropriate steps to register this document as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament as well as a Working Paper of the Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency in Armaments, and to have it distributed to all member delegations and non-member States participating in the work of the Conference.

Sincerely,

(signed) Stephen J. Ledogar
Ambassador

United States Views on the Continuing Operation and Further Development of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms

Continuing Operation of the Register

The United States was pleased to see that 83 Member States from all regions of the world submitted data and information to the United Nations Register in its first year of operation. The large number of participants during the first year underscores the keen interest the world community has in promoting greater openness and transparency in conventional arms transfers. The first year's result bodes well for continuing operation of the Register. While we are disappointed in the overall quality of the returns, the United States strongly supports continuation of the Register. The United States would, however, like to see many more countries participate than the 83 which did so in 1993. We are thus actively encouraging non-participants to make submissions in the coming years - even if their reports are only nil reports.

Not only does significant participation demonstrate the viability of the Register, but more importantly it establishes openness and transparency in conventional arms transfers as the first truly global confidence-building measure. Although many of the 1993 submissions were nil reports, the large number of participants nevertheless demonstrated that the procedures established for reporting data on transfers to the Register worked fairly well. In this respect, the regional conferences sponsored by the United Nations proved useful both for the instructions they provided and for the opportunity they offered for exchanges of views among national representatives on a wide range of issues relevant to the submissions and to national import/export policies. The United States believes that the 1994 Group of Governmental Experts should take an in-depth look at lessons learned in the first year of operation of the Register.

Since one of the key United States objectives in this transparency measure is to encourage countries to develop national procedures for reviewing the potential impact conventional arms transfers may have on regional and international stability, the United States was pleased that some submissions included, in addition to data on conventional arms transfers, information on national arms import and export policies, legislation, and administrative procedures. The United States would like to see more States contribute such information, including those States submitting only nil reports regarding arms transfers. It is our hope that this compendium on national policies may prove a useful adjunct to the data on transfers. In this respect, the United Nations will be able to make such information available to Member States in some consolidated fashion. The United States considers this valuable reservoir of information an important aspect of the Register.

Regarding specific operational procedures for the Register, as the United States foreshadowed in its submission, there were some inconsistencies in the number of transfers reported by some importing and exporting States due to differences in transfer dates and in the manner in which transfers are defined by

different States. As was indicated in the cover letter from Ambassador Albright which forwarded our 1993 submission, the United States considers a conventional arms transfer to have occurred at the time equipment titles are transferred. While it may be ambitious to expect to achieve a universal definition of transfers, it is the United States view that the 1994 Group of Governmental Experts should work toward this goal. At a minimum, each country should be required to make explicit the definition it employs with its submission.

Regarding the deadline for submissions to the United Nations, the United States notes that while the announced deadline is 30 April of each year, during the first year of operation the Register actually remained open until late October, causing the final United Nations report to be delayed until November. Recognizing that first year delays are to be expected, we would nevertheless encourage adherence to the deadline in the future. We also encourage publication of the Register as soon as possible (May/June) to ensure timely distribution of the data and information.

Further Development of the Register

As a result of the first year's experience, the United States is of the view that while the seven categories used for reporting equipment on conventional arms transfers are not ideal for every situation, they represent the best fit for global reporting of conventional arms imports and exports. As a result, the United States strongly supports retaining these seven categories. In this respect, the United States believes that the 1994 Group of Governmental Experts should again examine the existing seven categories and definitions to determine if further adjustments to them are necessary. The United States is also of the view that it could prove useful and productive if the Group of Governmental Experts would also take a closer look at other more complicated issues such as how leased equipment and co-production are to be treated in the context of the Register.

As demonstrated through the United States proposal in the Geneva Conference on Disarmament in the spring of 1993, the United States recommends that United Nations Member States provide available background information on military holdings and procurement through national production as a means of increasing transparency and openness related to conventional arms. The United States remains committed to increasing transparency so that a full and balanced picture of conventional armaments is developed.

On the issues of weapons of mass destruction and the transfer of high technology with military applications, the United States believes that these issues are not yet ripe for addition to the Register, as they were only cursorily touched on in recent Conference on Disarmament discussions. It is the United States view that much more study and discussion will be required before a proper framework for understanding the necessity and means of promoting transparency in these areas can be found. The United States remains prepared to participate in such discussions.